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ABSTRACT

This paper concentrates on incidents of severe conflict in eighth-grade classrooms observed in studies of four socially diverse junior high schools in two districts. Severe conflict is generated when teachers violate students' conceptions of the character of legitimate classroom authority. In a cosmopolitan community within an urban complex, students of both high and low social status and academic achievement were unusually skeptical of the schools' good faith. The school staffs had especially small resources for exercizing forms of control other than authority. Consequently, the character and importance of authority emerged with unusual clarity in classroom encounters. In a small, conservative, midwestern city, there was a significant contrast. Neither teachers nor students were self-conscious about the character of authority, and at first glance classroom conflicts appeared to stem from personality characteristics and conflicts. But, analysis of interaction in the light of findings in the first district suggests that, though the participants were less articulate in their claims, adherence to norms defining the legitimate character of authority was as crucial to harmony and conflict in the second district as in the first. (Author)

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CLASHES IN THE CLASSROOM: THE IMPORTANCE OF NORMS FOR AUTHORITY

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CLASHES IN THE CLASSROOM: THE IMPORTANCE OF NORMS FOR AUTHORITY[1]

Schools are losing many of their traditional resources for controlling their students. Community groups, court decisions, and state laws are limiting their use of coercion. Parents and children will no longer accept earlier forms of physical and mental regimentation as measures of control. Grades are important sources of control only over ambitious students. Grade inflation corrodes their value.

Yet despite the loss of these resources for obtaining students' compliance, the schools have lost none of their responsibility and accountability for orderly conduct and mental concentration among their students. From Waller's (1932) early discussion of the chaos which was always a potential in the most orderly of the regimented schools of the twenties to reports of current surveys in which "discipline" is always a major concern of teachers, the evidence consistently suggests that order is perennially fragile and problematic in public schools. Careful organization of groups and activities, imaginative curricula, competent teaching, and pleasant, tactful behavior by adults may increase the voluntary cooperation of students, but students' self-restraint alone will not support order in a sizable public school. Recent reports on schools which have attempted to organize activities around the students' interests suggest that many founder on the problem of order. The difficulty of obtaining consistent attention either pushes teachers to resume a more demanding stance which stresses classroom rules and order before students' interests (Gracey, 1972) or pushes them to yield the focus of attention to students' initiatives, thus diffusing efforts and often leading eventually to pervasive student discontent and disinterest (Dornbusch and Scott, 1975:

Swidler, forthcoming).

Where then are the teachers and administrators responsible for safety, civility and learning to turn? In large part they must turn where they always have for the fundamental basis of their control over students, to authority. But now authority stands increasingly alone in their repertoire of social control, and thus it becomes more visible and subject to scrutiny.

As schools become more dependent on relationships of authority, some traditionalists argue that this form of social control, too, is being eroded, while some reformers argue that it is not--but should be. The research reported here suggests that generally students as well as adults support authority as an inherent part of school relationships. But they may differ seriously over its definition. To understand authority or to practice it successfully increasingly requires an appreciation for the fundamental elements which set it apart as a special kind of relationship and for the varied forms in which those elements may appear and combine.

These statements are based upon study of four junior high schools in two disparate communities. In "Canton", a cosmopolitan community within an urban complex, students were highly self-conscious about appropriate forms of authority and adults had few other resources for control over them. Conflicts over the proper character of authority were common and easily identifiable. In "Avon" a conservative community of 50,000 serving an agricultural region, conceptions of authority were more unified and more implicit within interaction. Nonetheless, study of both communities underscored the importance of authority for the maintenance of civil and productive classroom interaction. And in both an understanding of the fundamental properties of the relationship and their variations was useful. The majority of this article consists of an analysis of the place of authority in harmony and particularly in conflict in

the classrooms of the two communities. The argument requires an introductory discussion of the character of authority.

AUTHORITY

Whether one follows the analytic tradition founded by Max Weber or the one founded by Chester Barnard, a few characteristics of authority are fundamental. Authority is distinguished from other relationships of command and obedience by the superordinate's right to command and the subordinate's duty to obey. This right and this duty stem from the crucial fact that the interacting persons share a relationship which exists for the service of a moral order to which both owe allegiance.

Authority exists as an instrument to realize the moral order. The superordinate has the power of command because he is more able than others to perceive the kinds of actions which will serve its needs. But despite the crucial importance of the moral order as the basis of the relationship of command and obedience between superordinate and subordinate, frequently neither makes reference to it in most of their interactions. In ordinary circumstances, the subordinate trusts the superordinate's competence and good faith in the service of the moral order sufficiently to assume that the superordinate's specific commands further its requirements. The fact that the superordinate has given the command is sufficient guaranty of its validity. The act of obedience discharges the subordinate's obligation to the moral order.

In the give-and-take of daily contact, then, the position of the superordinate comes to be the immediate source of his right to command. And indeed the man in the street, even the semi-professional subordinate (Peabody, 1964), commonly comes to identify authority with the person of the superordinate. So long as events go along smoothly this model suffices.

But when trouble arises, when the superordinate has to make unconventional or heavy demands, or when the subordinate grows restive, then both will tend to call upon the moral order directly to sustain--or object to--a command.

It is at this point that the fundamental character of authority becomes problematic to the participants and visible to the analyst. In grappling with authority, Max Weber (1958) emphasized that it could appear in a variety of forms which he distinguished mostly in terms of the character of the moral order, the role of the superordinate, and the relationship between the two. Most important for our purposes are traditional authority and rational legal authority as he described them. In traditional authority the moral order is diffuse, defined mostly by custom. It is a shared and valued way of life. The superordinate holds his position by virtue of personal wisdom and is given wide latitude to interpret individual situations out of his own judgment within the bounds of customary precedent. By virtue of his wisdom he is partially identified with the moral order and subordinates have little appeal to it beyond his interpretations unless these obviously violate precedent.

Rational legal authority as Weber defined it is a blend of what has been called the authority of office and the authority of expertise. The moral order is expressed in codified rules or related to specialized knowledge to which subordinates can make independent appeal. The superordinate commands because his occupation of an organizational position or his expert's training give him superior knowledge, or understanding, of the moral order. In theory, he ought to be able to give a logical justification for every command.

In modern life the parent of younger children may be the purest example of a traditional superordinate. Parents teach the values which support their own authority, and third parties are most reluctant to question either their premises or their specific edicts. Teachers, especially elementary and

secondary teachers, occupy a position transitional between parents and bureaucratic superiors, so that the traditional or rational-legal character of their authority is ambiguous and subject to debate.

Looking at authority in a very different context from Weber, Chester Barnard emphasized other aspects of the phenomenon. Where Weber emphasized the moral order and the role of the superordinate, Barnard emphasized the moral order and the role of the subordinate. He argued that authority will be successful when a command furthers the moral order as the subordinate understands it. This aspect of authority is not evident, he argued, because under ordinary circumstances subordinates obey their superiors' commands "without conscious question" out of trust in the superordinates' consistent service to the moral order (Barnard, 1938, pp. 163-174).

However, under certain circumstances subordinates will have reason to test superordinates' commands against their own comprehension of the needs of the moral order, and then it is the latter which will finally determine their judgment. Such questionning is most likely to occur on a regular basis when the moral order is vague, diverse, or morally loaded, when the technical means of realizing it are subject to debate, or when the subordinate has responsibility for, or a stake in, the outcome. For the majority of interactions in formal organizations these conditions do not hold. But for the interactions of teachers and students in ordinary secondary school classrooms they do hold, or they do potentially.

Neither the ends nor the content of school curricula are clearly agreed upon and the best means of educating children in general, and various categories of them in particular, are subject to running debate. Further, children have an acute interest and a realistic stake in the school's pursuit of its moral order, education. They are the "product" of the organization and their futures

are importantly affected by the goals of the school and its success in working with each of them (in terms both of skills and substance acquired and of grades or other evaluations received). Thus there exist strong pressures in schools for the institution of forms of authority which take account of students' right to assess both the validity of the moral order and the competence and good faith of the teachers whose commands are supposed to realize its imperatives.

Students are in a sense clients (Bidwell, 1970) and in a sense subordinates in a complex technical undertaking. But the school is responsible for more than their education, it must also sort and evaluate students as it passes them on to the labor market. Further, it must maintain order not only among "ordinary" students but also among the unwilling who attend by compulsion of law and among the self-confidently talented who seek to remake the school around their particular intellectual needs (Spady, 1974).

The school operating as parent, as expert educator, as classifier of new material for the labor force, and as custodial repository for the energetic but not yet employable young is pressed to employ a variety of forms of authority. Thus school staffs, students, and parents may disagree among themselves and with each other over whether the authority of the teacher (or principal) should be traditional authority, that of office, or that of the rational expert consulting with subordinates or clients. In order to understand or to act in any particular school it may be necessary to understand what the various relevant parties mean as they bring their morally charged expectations for "proper" authority to the situation. Canton and Avon are settings in which these definitions are poles apart. But teachers and students in both communities had explicit or intuitive claims concerning the legitimacy of the basic elements of relationships of authority.

Not surprisingly, it was in conflict that conceptions of authority, held most of the time as unexamined assumptions, became visible in the dramatic action which emanates from moral outrage. Let us consider the occasions for and character of classroom conflict in the two settings.

CONFLICT IN THE SCHOOLS OF CANTON--RATIONAL AUTHORITY

Canton's junior high schools[2] had matched integrated student bodies and so can be discussed together. At the time of the study (1967-68), black students were keenly aware of rising militant groups in the urban area. The black population of Canton itself had strong leaders both moderate and militant and the non-white adult population had more education than the average for urban non-whites but no more income. The black students in the public schools thus were ready to be observant of the educational goals and means imbedded in classroom relationships imposed by their teachers.

Canton included in its boundaries a large university with the hubbub of political activity, the rallies, and demonstrations common to the late sixties. The upper middle class white children were led by these activities and frequently by their parents' criticism of the government and the Vietnamese war to be critical of adults' claims to unquestioned traditional authority.

Teachers had few resources for control other than authority with which to quench the passions or curb the expression of indignant students. Schools always lack for the extrinsic rewards of pay and promotion which form a mainstay of organizational control over employees. Grades, the closest parallel, are generally of little use with children who perennially do poorly. But in Canton, even the able children, made bold by the self-assurance of university students and by the liberal admissions policy of the respected state university took little care for their records. Many had wildly erratic grades which

reflected their varied relations with their teachers.

Canton's staff also lacked coercive methods of control. Corporal punishment was strictly forbidden and suspensions were limited by state law. Parents and community groups were closely observant of more informal means of control. Perhaps most significant, recent desegregation, changes in hiring policies, and the changing temper of the times made it impossible for the schools to develop a unified and inevitable character, to present a definition of the situation which students would accept without reflection as a given condition of their existence. Especially at one of the schools which had a badly divided staff, students could see that the practices of teachers were the product of their individual decisions concerning proper goals and relationships in a school.

Yet despite this lack of resources for control, the Canton schools were not, on the whole, the scenes of unbridled disorder or even of endemic conflict. While scarcely a class went by without some distracting activity on the part of at least one child, generally the teacher was able to get the student to desist, at least for the moment, with verbal directives or alterations in activity or pace. The students accepted the teacher's right to quash distracting activity and no real conflict was engendered.

When real conflict did occur it almost always arose from the student's perception that the teacher had asked for obedience while violating some aspect of the legitimate character of authority. The teacher might fail to play his or her own role properly, might cast the role of the student in an inappropriate or insulting light, or worst of all might fail to serve educational ends, the moral order, in giving commands. Let us briefly consider each case.

Rejection of the Teacher's Capacity to Play the Superordinate Role

All classes of children challenged teachers to find out if they were personally in control of the skills which qualified them to act as agents of the goals of the school. If they lacked the capacity genuinely to represent these goals, then they lost their claim to the right of command over students.

Children in the top tracks chose academic ground upon which to challenge the teachers. Teachers who made mistakes or displayed a lack of confidence in the face of such a challenge would, in these students' eyes, lose their claim to act as legitimate agents of academic learning. They would be barraged with niggling questions and corrections as a demonstration of the students' lack of faith in their claims to authoritative status. However, teachers who passed this test decisively would be trusted to be capable of imparting knowledge and leading analysis, trusted to be legitimate superordinates appropriately claiming authority.

One of the academically best prepared English teachers described this process in a ninth grade class. After some experience he had developed a quick recognition of such challenges and a strategy for unanswerably demonstrating his capacities.

> "The Honors kids instinctively test each teacher they get to see whether or not they're smart enough to teach them. For instance Dick Stein. The first day in class we were talking about what literature was, what our purposes were to be, and he talked about Tristram Shandy. Well, so I just gave him some of his talk back again, exchanged some rapid conversation about how this book related to that, how this concept related to the other. And piled it up over his head and buried him in verbiage.
>
> That was the end of any problems with Dick. Dick and I get along beautifully. And he has a lot of troubles with his other teachers. Because he can put them down.

Students in the lower academic tracks had difficulty judging teachers' academic competence, unless the teachers made blatant mistakes or failed to try to teach. These students did mention repeatedly in interviews that some

teachers explained well or badly or were especially willing or unwilling to explain and to help a student who was having difficulty. Faithful performance of academic duties and the capacity to meet the child's mode of comprehension were the test of competence here.

Lower track students (overwhelmingly black in Canton) made their most direct challenges of a teacher in matters of regulation of distracting physical activity. For these students part of the necessary qualification for occupation of legitimate superordinate status was the capacity to insist that students engage in official classroom activity. They would be boisterous, clearly watching a teacher to see if he could stop them, and they would make fantastic fibbing excuses to see if the teacher were capable of directing their activity or could be fooled, distracted, or defeated by their energetic nonconformity. A teacher who could not successfully stop them was not competent to hold the office and would meet teasing and boisterous play all year.

Just as lower level students did some testing for academic competence, upper level students would also test to see if a teacher could keep them working, though much of the play they would try to get away with was verbal, including long digressions by the class as a whole from the subject officially at hand.

Rejection of the Teacher's Definition of the Student Role

The students would engage in conflict with teachers who seemed to picture their own character or their school role in a way they found insulting. Lower track students vehemently rejected teachers who made no effort seriously to teach. They took the teacher's reluctance as a sign of his or her belief that they were incapable of learning and they responded with hurt and hostility.

Because these students liked and were accustomed to structured written lessons, even some of the teachers who attempted in good faith to break from traditional patterns seemed to them not to take them seriously as learners. They resented such teachers unless they made their faith in the students' ability to learn and their own dedication to that goal very clear.

The students in the top tracks were most likely to reject teachers for their picture of the student role when they treated students as consistently frivolous or as younger than they were. They wanted, like the lower level students to be taken seriously, and their demands were higher. An example of a teacher rejected on these grounds was Miss Bock, who had taught in the primary grades for much of her career and maintained much of the style and even the language which she used in that context. She was disliked by students at all track levels. An upper track student describes her classroom manner:

> She treats the kids like kindergarteners. And when she's angry, it's just like the old schoolhouse. See she goes (he claps his hands), "Let's come to order now." . . . She addresses the class as "children" all the time and these are kids that are thirteen and fourteen years old and it sort of bothers them. I mean they won't say this is why I don't like it, but it's just the atmosphere of the classroom.

Rejection of a Teacher's Claim to Serve His Proclaimed Educational Goals

The strongest classroom conflicts occurred when the students perceived the teachers to be claiming the right to demand obedience while they clearly failed to serve educational goals. An incompetent teacher was unable to serve them, and so less strongly condemned than a teacher who willfully betrayed or neglected them. Such teachers seemed to be asking students to be personally subordinate to them, to obey their whims rather than the needs of the educational process. When students of any level perceived a teacher to be making such a claim, they rose in angry rebellion. Students judged a

teacher's good faith in serving educational goals according to their own definition of those goals. Thus disagreement over educational goals could appear to the students as the teacher's bad faith in their service.

This kind of conflict often arose between high track classes and teachers who followed a model of authority close to Weber's traditional authority. Since for Canton's high track students authority was rational authority based on expertise, the teachers' right to command rested upon their demonstrating that their directions served educational goals. Their status was questionable if they could not make such a demonstration.

Consequently confrontations occurred in which students said, "Why should we do it?" and the teacher in essence replied, "Because I say so!" To the student this reply looked like an attempt to impose simple personal subordination in the name of authority and he would grow angrier. "What does it have to do with what we're supposed to be learning?" he would ask, in effect. And the teacher would reply, in effect, "If your teacher says it has something to do with learning that is all you need to know. Now stop this impudent questioning." For the teacher, to give an explanation would be to weaken his claim to complex personal wisdom as the basis of his superordinate status. For the student, the teacher's not giving an explanation undermined his claim to interpret educational goals as the basis of superordinate status. But because their definitions of the elements of authority were different the insistence of each upon his own definition destroyed his standing in the other's eyes as a person responsibly participating in authority.

An example of this kind of conflict arose in an English class at the Track One level taught by the teacher described as treating children like kindergarteners. The discussion concerned Faulkner's short story, "A Rose

for Emily" which the class had read in preparation for the hour.

> Max kept calling out answers. Sometimes he would raise his hand and Miss Bock would recognize him. Sometimes he would get to make his point even though he called out because Miss B. did not cut him off before most of it was out. On one of these occasions when he did get to make the point, but Miss B. then cut him off, Dick spoke up saying, "He's right though." Miss Bock cut off Dick too, saying, "Don't call out."
>
> Max had raised his hand by now and a girl named Sally had hers up. Miss Bock said she was going to ask Sally what she thought. Dick protested, but Miss Bock replied, "You didn't have your hand up; you have to wait your turn. Sally had her hand up first, Max is second, and you are third. Sally?"
>
> Both Dick and Sally were saying "But . . . but . . ." during this reply. Sally responded to being called on by saying that Dick was first. Miss Bock said "All right then," and listened to Dick. The class was making restless movements.
>
> Dick argued that Max had a good point because the theme of the story is--but Miss Bock cut him off, saying "Don't tell me what the theme of the story is; that's not an answer to my question. That's the problem with a lot of you on your tests. You talk about something that's only tangentially related to the question."
>
> Dick was sputtering "but," but Miss Bock put up her hand, and wouldn't let him get it out. She said, "Wait. I want an answer to my question. I'm not saying what you're saying isn't true or valid, or that it isn't important, but it's not an answer to my question. I asked about the meaning of that one sentence."
>
> The class as a group was plainly restless and seemed annoyed at her handling of the situation. Dick seemed to be trying to say that to understand the sentence you had to understand the meaning of the story as a whole, but Miss Bock was trying to do little more than unscramble a Faulknerian sentence and see in a simple sense why the various parts were there. It took some time for her to be able to get the discussion going again at all, but she did get some answers out of some of the girls, two or three.

Miss Bock does not explain why she wants only the answer to her questions. Her refusal to let someone say how the theme of the story affects the sentence uses up a good deal of time and good will from the class. But it seems to be important to her that she establish her right to get the kind of answer she wants, simply because she is the teacher and that is the way she wants things

done. Max, the instigator of the incident was one of the most persistently rebellious of all the high track students in the school. But Dick was far more conforming and in an interview spoke critically of Max's general behavior. Sally was a quiet student in the rest of the hour and in other classes. They insist on pursuing the point of the sentence and the story together because it seems to make sense. They expect a refusal to explain why it does not make sense.

In lower track classes students most often perceived teachers to be failing to act in the service of educational goals either when they clearly did not make any effort to teach or when they gave a child a punishment but either refused to name the crime or refused to believe the student's protestations of innocence.

> (The class was working at their desks.) Miss Brown looked up again and said to Stillman, "All right, go in the back corner without your books." There had only been a very quiet murmur in the room. I don't know whether Stillman was the source of it or not.
>
> Stillman asked very quietly, almost in a mumble, what he had done. Miss Brown simply told him to go on, without his books. Stillman asked, this time clearly audibly, what he had done. Miss Brown said, "Don't talk back, Stillman. Go on back in the corner." Stillman said he was not talking back, he was simply asking what he had done. Why should he have to go back there?
>
> Miss Brown said, "Because I'm telling you to." She looked down to her work again. Stillman just sat there. She looked up again and he mumbled that he wanted to know what he had done. Miss Brown said, "We'll discuss it later." Stillman still insisted that he must know what he did. Miss Brown picked up the pad of referral notices and told him warningly to go on back. He kept his ground silently and she said, "All right," and put down the pad. She told him to go out in the hall without his books and wait until she brought him the referral notice. "Go on, hurry up." Slowly and reluctantly but without pausing, he went.

In a quiet way Stillman was offering Miss Brown ferocious resistance. He stoicly accepts a much larger punishment than his original one rather than yield to her in this matter of principle. It is not clear whether or not he

was guilty of making the noise that caused her to look up, but the issue quickly became one of his right to have a justification for punishment versus her right to unquestioning obedience.

In the intimacy of the classroom, even the tone of voice in which a teacher gives a reprimand or punishment is important in a student's acceptance of its legitimacy. If the teacher's tone implies personal dislike or an attempt to humiliate, the action will be taken as a personal attack rather than an action in the service of legitimate classroom order and education. The students in the lower tracks in Canton had a finely tuned sensitivity in these matters.

Finally, the black children in all tracks checked very carefully to see if their teachers seemed to treat all students alike. This was particularly the case when the class was racially integrated. It was far more important to a teacher's claim to be acting in authority rather than out of a desire to be personally superordinate that he treated everyone similarly than that he be either lenient or kindly. One boy explained this in an interview. He was very angry at his French teacher who treated different people committing the same offense in very different ways. Asked what the relationship between strictness and fairness was, he explained it this way:

> Like my French teacher . . . she gives me a bad time and she's unfair, you know. But other teachers they give everybody a bad time, you know, then that's fair. Like they give white, colored, Chinese, everybody gets a bad time, just mean teachers. (Emphasis speaker's)

In Avon students' definitions of goals and roles were different and relationships far less self-conscious. Yet here too students tested the legitimacy of teachers' exercise of authority and rebelled when they found it wanting.

CONFLICT IN THE AVON SCHOOLS: TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

Avon is a small city of about 50,000 in the agricultural heartland of the United States. Forty miles from the nearest community of over 100,000 it subsists on heavy industry and service to the surrounding farming areas.[3] Faithfully Republican in state and national elections, it is a conventional, locally centered community. The vast majority of teachers and administrators have grown up, acquired their education, and practiced their profession close to Avon. To a remarkable degree they share a single educational perspective.

The students and their parents are predominantly working class with a few local managers and professionals included because the community is too small to support significant suburbs. Less than 10% of the population is black and many of these have lived in Avon for a century and have gained a degree of status and economic security there. Another substantial but uncounted proportion of the school population are the children of migrants from Appalachia who feel the effects of the requirement to adjust from rural to urban ways. The data on which this report is based were gathered in a study of two of Avon's five junior high schools in the spring of 1975[4].

In Avon there were many more resources for control than in Canton. Close agreement among staff, parents, and students upon the character of schooling was perhaps the staff's greatest resource for control. Attachment to straightforward imparting of the knowledge to be found in texts through recitation and writing added the ease of routine technological methods to the power of consensus. Further, for the rebellious or mischievious, coercion and the threat of coercion were an accepted and expected part of school life. Administrators could paddle students and did so on at least a weekly, often

(n a daily basis. Grades, while not important to the poorer achievers, were a matter of constant concern and anxiety to stronger students who were much less sanguine than Canton's about their hold upon leading positions in society. Grades thus provided teachers an effective lever in quelling resistance from able and questioning students. Avon's schools had these characteristics in common, but demographic differences in the schools led to very different daily lives as students and teachers responded to one another at each school site.

Dale: Acceptance of Traditional Authority

Dale Junior High School had a student body approximating a cross section of the city, though it received fewer than its share of stable blue collar families and more than its share of upper middle class leading families. The school was tightly run according to the principles of Avon's educational credo. Consider the following contrasts with situations in Canton cited above. The first incident occurred in a high ability English class:

> They go over spelling words and definitions. A girl says she found budget defined as a leather pouch. Mrs. Bruner says, "Are you sure you looked up the right word?" The girl says yes. Mrs. Bruner says, "It is probably not a preferred definition." (Leather pouch is in fact the first meaning given for budget in my 1960 Webster's. This first definition ends with "hence"; the usual definition is given fourth.)

Mrs. Bruner did not take the occasion for discussing the way that dictionaries order meanings, and the students accepted her dismissal of the girl's question.

A second incident occurred in a low ability "reading" class. A white boy named Ian had been commenting on events for the class from time to time and had failed to have paper for a regular spelling test:

> Mrs. Shamus said quite suddenly, "Ian go to the office." I've been dimly aware of talk and movement to my left where Ian sits, but it was not loud or punctuated. Ian says he wasn't doing anything. Mrs. Shamus replies that he should not have been standing up. He says he was just stretching. She says he was playing with other students. He starts to object again, but she turns coldly away from him as he speaks and addresses another student. He goes out. He is back in no more than five minutes. He gives Mrs. Shamus a pass, then goes to the back of the room to his seat where he is quiet for the rest of the class period.

In both cases Dale's students accept the teachers' decrees, where Canton's would probably have taken a stand on principle. Are they then less concerned with the legitimacy of authority exercised over them? They may have been less concerned, but they were not unconcerned. Their overt behavior and their attitudes differed from those of Canton's students for several reasons.

First, the small town children of Avon in the seventies had a different definition of appropriate authority from the cosmopolitan urbanites of Canton in the sixties. Like their elders, Avon's children perceived educational ends as the incorporation of a standard body of knowledge and the development of facility in standard skills. They expected the teacher to be proficient in furthering these ends. If the teacher says the meaning of a word is "not preferred," curiosity does not urge them to ask why it is not preferred or why if it is not it is listed first in the dictionary. They are there to learn accepted ways of coping in the tasks of life. The teacher in question was generally clear and compelling in presenting those ways within the boundaries generally accepted in Avon.

Second, even when they might want to object, Avon students were restrained by their greater or equal interest in the rewards and punishments of grades as compared to those of mastering content. Their lively interest in grades supported their definition of learning as the acceptance of a body of knowledge defined by others.

Finally, in the case of the boy who was punished for playing when he claimed he was not, the real threat of paddling or suspension, worsened by the teacher's increasing anger, may have led him to be quiet out of prudence.

Less self-conscious than Canton's students about their educational goals, their rights as budding persons, and their teachers' capacity to make good on claims, Dale's students were swayed by more mundane forms of control. They accepted the ways of the school as inevitable.

Within limits. When a teacher fairly dramatically violated even the standards agreed upon in the school, students would become restless, or if the threat of retaliation were not too great, rebellious. Consider first a class with a first year teacher who seemed to me after following her through a school day to be lacking in competence and in eagerness to improve her academic and communicative skills.

> The students come in and sit down and talk volubly with one another. The noise level is high, but they are not shouting; there are just many conversations in one room. The period starts at 12:30. They talk until 12:35. Then Mrs. Shamus says something I can't hear from my seat in the back. There is little response. Then she really shouts, "I want it quiet right now!" They stop talking virtually instantly. She goes over their dittoed spelling lists . . . Then she tells them she will give them a little longer to study for the test. At least half of them chatter with each other again during this time.
>
> Mrs. Shamus then says "Take out a sheet of paper and a pen. Put everything else away." They get ready and take the test very seriously. . . . At the twentieth word, their heads and backs rise as if on springs. They start to chat with one another. Mrs. Shamus says she has several announcements. . . . During these, at one point chatting is audible again. She says loudly and a little angrily, "I'm not finished yet." . . .
>
> They work with their grammar books the rest of the period. Mrs. Shamus asks them what adjectival words are. No answer. "You have only to look at the cartoon," she says, somewhat condescendingly. No luck. No answers. She has a boy read the definition. She asks a couple more questions and gets no answers. She says, "How are we (sic) going to get an A on the test Friday if we can't remember the things we learned last week?" Her voice has a prim, even prissy, tone.

She has them read from the book definitions of various kinds of adjectival words. Every time she asks a question of the class at large there is silence. (She calls on individuals and most give right answers after hesitation, though some get mixed up.)

Mrs. Shamus asks, "Is that enough? Do you understand? Now is the time to ask, not when the test comes. If you don't understand, ask me now and I'll give you more examples and try to help you out." Silence. She asks a particular boy if he understands. He says yes. She goes on to the next topic.

I have the feeling she cannot explain very clearly. . . . She does not really try to.

Dale students in high track classes did not ordinarily chat while the teacher talked or when they were supposed to study. They did not seem to respect Mrs. Shamus, but they did fear the power of the grade which she flourished so visibly. With a different teacher the students were even more openly rebellious. This teacher was teaching outside his field and chose to compensate for his incompetence by being friendly and jocular rather than threatening or punitive.

(Fourth period. The teacher has just given a demonstration for which the students gathered in front of the room.) When he finishes, after less than five minutes probably, they talk as they return to their seats. Someone says, "Well, that's it for the day. We've had our lesson." Mr. Cadbury sits at his desk and says nothing for a while. The students chat. Then he looks up and tells them to get out their books. . . . (He assigns four pages in their books to read. While they are reading a buzz of conversation arises. Some questions about the day's assembly are directed to the teacher who answers them at length.)

After a while he says, "May I have your attention?" He tells them he will be handing out question sheets which they should save to use for study sheets. Remember the test will come from these. Someone must have mumbled that they were easy, because Mr. Cadbury, looking toward the far corner of the room, says, "Yes, they're easy if you study." . . .

When they finish the sheets, Mr. Cadbury says, "Good you moved fast on that." A student says, "Yup, you taught us all that in ten minutes." The implication is that not much had been learned in the period. But the student did not say it directly to Mr. Cadbury, who ignores it.

This class was the most direct of those I saw in a full day with Mr. Cadbury in criticizing his consistent pattern of giving little work. But other classes also engaged in expressive grumbling not addressed directly to the teacher. Mr. Cadbury's patience wore thinner as the day went along, and he made more disciplinary threats and cutting comments. However, he rarely carried out the threats and the students in later classes teased him in ways which expressed their rejection of his classes as proper teaching situations while remaining short of direct defiance. For example:

> A group of three girls were singing quietly. Mr. Cadbury said, "Ann!" She protested she was not singing. Mr. Cadbury said "That's all right. I yelled one name and all three stopped." Then he said, "Go ahead. Only it will cost you thirty." They did not seem impressed.
>
> At the end of the period when the work really was done, they were singing softly again. Mr. Cadbury said, "Girls, it wouldn't be so bad if you could sing." One of them said, "You're just jealous." Mr. Cadbury responded, "Kelly, you're not in too good a standing anyway. You'd better be careful or you can go down to the office and sing for Mr. Alexander (assistant principal)." Ann says--as though having a bright new idea--"Oh, that would be fun!" She looks around as though for assent from the other two to get up and go.

Thus, Dale's students did have an awareness of authority. When their simple standards for it were violated they grew restive. But often the rewards and punishments of grades and trips to the office held sufficient force for them to quell or damp their restiveness.

In the majority of classes these tangible controls were blended with an effective relationship of authority of a clear and inflexible sort. Teachers and students engaged in clearly patterned exchanges designed to help the student incorporate specific precepts following from accepted tradition and expressed in the materials chosen by the official hierarchy. The contrast of Dale with Fillmore suggests that order at Dale depended upon a student body which accepted adults' definitions of the goals and relationships appropriate to school authority, was anxious over grades, and feared punishment

by the "office." At Fillmore these conditions did not hold.

Fillmore: Traditional Authority as a Sign of Respect

Fillmore is located in an area which had been racially integrated for nearly thirty years but which was socially deteriorating at the time of the study. The students were nearly thirty per cent black. While some of these were poor, many were from stable working class families. The white students on the other hand, were often from poorer, less educated families than those of the blacks. Many families had come recently from Appalachia. With such a student body, a large proportion of whom were well established low achievers upon reaching junior high school, grades were not an important source of power. More important, the school had a considerable history of open conflict and the rebellious students had become hardened to the paddle and to suspension. To make matters worse, according even to his friends, the former principal had punished blacks less severely than whites. The white students, often already resentful of the blacks who were better prepared for school than they, were roiling with resentment. There had been a collective racial conflict the spring before the study. A new principal was brought in.

Some teachers who expected the kind of compliance given at Dale quickly grew resentful when they did not get it. Severe conflicts grew up. They were vicious circles in which teachers sorely transgressed against the requirements of legitimate authority and students responded with mounting defiance. Almost every corridor resounded with the conflicts in one or more of its rooms. Some examples of these interactions give their flavor. The first pair emphasizes the students' initiative in the conflict.

> Miss Metzger asked a very tall black boy to take off his hat. He asked why. She said to show respect (and something else I could not hear). He said "Respect for what? This is just school." She told him again to take it off and he did in an expressively casual way. He put it on and took it off several times during the period.
>
> (In a science class.) Jeff has his feet up on the desk and reads a book from the time he comes in until after the class is well in progress. Mrs. Carr tells him to take his feet off the desk. Jeff asks why. Mrs. Carr says because I tell you too. Jeff says something like "That's no reason." Jim says to Jeff, "That's enough," in some disgust. Jeff very slowly takes his feet down, carefully reading all the while.
>
> Douglas says someone has his pencil. He goes around trying to find it, accusing people. Finally, someone throws it to him, but misses. The others play catch with it, keeping it from him. (These three white boys engaged in similar behavior throughout the period. Jim alternated between joining and restraining the others.)

Descriptions of classes of the same two teachers concentrating upon the teacher's behavior illustrate the point that it takes two sides to create conflict or chaos of the degree found in Fillmore's worst classrooms.

> Miss Metzger opened the (music) class by calling them to order in a drill major voice which had anger in it. She immediately set an oppositional tone. The boys responded with much noise and body language. The girls seemed withdrawn. I noticed Don among the clowning boys. . . . (Don was a small black boy who was cooperative and answered capably in several classes with other teachers.)
>
> The boys seem sporadic in their willingness to sing. At one of the points where they stopped while Miss Metzger gave directions the boys made noise again. Miss Metzger picked up her classbook in a warning way, then put it on the piano. Then she stopped dramatically, picked up the book and marked in it. Several of the boys leaned forward to see what she wrote. One protested, "I didn't do nothing!" She did not reply.
>
> The whole was typified at one point when they had just started singing and some children I could not see must have been talking. Miss Metzger broke into the sweet sounds of "The Candyman" with a bellowed "Shut up!"

In a class with Mrs. Carr, the first nineteen minutes were taken up with setting up a nine-minute film, which she had already run for other classes that day. The class was given no work to do while she got the film ready. During this time she conferred with a student needing assignments for a

long absence, successfully moved several children for talking to their neighbors, and shouted at the class in general for quiet. She had a confrontation with a boy who was talking with another over whether he would move his seat when asked. She finally told him to "move or get out," but backed down when his partner quietly moved instead. When yet another boy was talking she told him to come to the back of the room where she was working with the projector. When he objected she shouted, "Back here, sir!" in a barking tone.

In this kind of context, classes in which teachers and students interacted courteously and constructively were the striking ones. Such classes at Fillmore had certain distinctive characteristics in common. Teachers set a brisk pace of activity and introduced an unmistakably businesslike atmosphere. They handled any distracting activity respectfully but firmly and quickly. They communicated a sense of competence and confidence both in themselves and in their students. They kept relationships courteous and impersonal, focused upon learning the material. In short what they did, intuitively or consciously, was to emphasize to students that their interaction, including its aspects of command and obedience, was instituted for the purpose of learning. They thus stressed authority with its impersonal task-related character in an atmosphere where students anticipated the insults of personal subordination and intimations that they could not learn. Authority became a vehicle for restoring or retaining mutual respect, and, consequently, easy cooperation.

CONCLUSION

These studies suggest that authority is the mainstay of classroom relationships. Other forms of control may mask its presence or compensate for its partial loss. But it is a necessary condition for reliable, easy, task-oriented relationships. When other forms of control fail, clear

understanding and fair practice of authority can restore constructive relations.

It is important to remember however, that there are many forms of authority. The character of superordinate-subordinate relationships and of the tie between each role and the moral order varies with the kind of authority in use in a particular context. And the substance of the moral order, which is the reason for being of the whole enterprise, is not necessarily clearly defined or static in content. In a vaguely defined context such as education which intimately affects subordinates' lives, they will have their own understanding of the moral order which justifies authoritative commands. Teachers and administrators can and do play a part in shaping that understanding, but where it differs from their own they ignore it at their peril. Further, even where there is general agreement on the moral order, the superordinate who expects to win respect must play his own role and cast his subordinate's role in ways which the subordinate understands to be well aligned to the needs of the educational task as he comprehends it and to be fair and respectful to all parties.

Relationships in Canton suggest the need to make traditionally oriented teachers aware of the varied ways in which classroom authority can reasonably be defined by students, so that they will not mistake principled debate for mere willfulness. Those in Avon suggest the need to remind reformers of the remaining strength of tradition for some students and of the moral and pedagogical force of authority exercised with competence, fairness, and simple personal respect in such settings. It is significant that in the diverse classrooms of all four schools it was task orientation--as defined by the participants--which provided the basis for co-operative, constructive relationships of authority.

NOTES

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[2]Canton's schools are analyzed in more detail in Metz (In press). The reader interested in methods of research and the broader school setting of which classroom interaction was a part is referred to that work.

[3]There is also a liberal arts college in the town which draws 1000 students from several states, but it does not have much impact on the local town or the local schools. The junior high which most of the children of its faculty and staff attend was not included in the study.

[4]See Metz (1976) for an account of methods used in the study and for consideration of the relationship between classroom behavior and the atmosphere of each school as a whole.

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